



Joint Committee on Appropriations, February 22, 2013

Testimony of Alicia Woodsby on HB 6350, An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2015, and other Provisions Relating to Revenue

Sen. Harp, Rep. Walker, Sen. Kane, Rep. Miner and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I am the Deputy Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC), a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and fostering best practices in community development.

I am here to testify on House Bill 6350, as it relates to the Department of Social Services. The PSC supports the Governor's proposal to reallocate housing and homeless services funds to the new Department of Housing. While the consolidation of housing functions needs to be done thoughtfully and carefully, we believe this is a tremendous opportunity to ensure that housing support, redevelopment, and development are done in a coordinated and more effective way.

The new Department of Housing presents a timely focus on statewide housing leadership, policy and systems and the development of a coordinated state housing agenda. The Department will seek enhanced coordination among and across service systems as a number of federal and state policy efforts are working toward this same vision. Reaching Home, the statewide campaign to prevent and end homelessness, shares the vision of a Department that reduces fragmentation between the state's housing resources and supports, and is more consumer-friendly and easier to navigate.

People in need of housing and homeless services interface with multiple systems and settings, which has generally been a maze of confusion for those who are trying to coordinate mental health, substance abuse, health care, transportation, social service benefits, housing, and other community supports. Furthermore, homelessness is a complex issue that is inextricably linked to a multitude of other policy and systems issues spanning child welfare, health care, education, workforce systems, criminal justice, affordable housing, crisis response, mental health and substance abuse, domestic violence, and transportation, among others. In order for the Department to be effective, there must be a strong imperative to develop clear and formal connections with the key agencies serving individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness and severe housing instability. The Department can coordinate across these systems to improve access to and targeting of housing related service and supports.

The Governor has demonstrated a strong commitment to affordable and supportive housing, which includes additional proposals for rapid re-housing, new supportive housing units, the creation of new



affordable housing, and sustained investments in public housing revitalization in the FY 14-15 biennial budget. These resources are proposed for the new Department of Housing and represent significant advancements toward meeting the demands for housing and service supports outlined by Reaching Home.

Lastly, we believe that the proposal for the state to take possession of any federal annual Social Security increases provided to people are "aged, blind, or disabled" is counterproductive to the work of the PSC to improve the health outcomes and economic security for underserved populations facing severe poverty and disproportionately high rates of premature mortality and shorter life expectancy. These minimal cost of living increases help to avoid further financial crisis and rationing of resources for basic needs, such as food and medications.

I am available to address any questions.

Thank you very much.